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WORDS OF LIFE FOR OUR TIME Booklet No. 2

TITLE: "THE VOICE OF THE BRIDEGROOM"

NOTE: "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the lamb is come, and his wife hath MADE HERSELF READY." (Rev. 19:7). Christ is going to return for a PREPARED people who have made themselves READY. This requires much more than just professing to be a Christian, or even knowing that one is saved. This booklet will help you to understand just what the Lord requires of those who aspire to be CALLED into His very presence to share His intimate fellowship and glory in His own Kingdom realm. "They that were READY went in with him (Christ, the Bridegroom) to the marriage: and the door was SHUT" (Mt. 25:10). If you wish to understand the questions of BRIDESHIP, SONSHIP, etc., then read carefully the contents of this booklet. Do not read casually or hurriedly, but slowly, carefully and prayerfully, and ALONG WITH YOUR BIBLE, looking up the scripture references as you read.

INTRODUCTION

All signs indicate that the time is drawing near for the sounding forth of the greatest CRY since Jesus uttered the triumphant words from the cross, "It is finished" (John 19:30). I refer to Matt. 25:6, where we read: "And at midnight there was a CRY made. Behold the bridegroom cometh; go [] out to meet him." This CRY will likely be made by the two witnesses when they suddenly appear in Jerusalem to proclaim the imminent return of the Lord. However, there is also a sense in which this CRY is going forth NOW, through messengers whom the Lord has chosen.

It is significant to note that the scriptures show Christ returning to this earth first as a BRIDEGROOM. (Later, as "King of Kings and Lord of Lords"--Rev. 19:16). It should be rather obvious that a Bridegroom would come for His Bride, who goes into the marriage with Him (Matt. 25:10). Some teach that there is to be a "Bridegroom company" who, along with Christ, is to "marry" the "Bride company." I personally fail to find any scriptural backing for such a teaching. However, I certainly won't argue with those who differ, and I refuse to make such differences a hindrance to unity and fellowship in Christ. All the scriptures which mention the Bridegroom seem to reserve this unique and exalted position to Christ alone. *[Ed note: evidence for the "Bridegroom company" concept is likely drawn from Isa. 62:5, "so shall your sons wed you." But in cosmic context, this does not speak to a "Bridegroom company," but of the final uniting of the historically outcast sons of the prophets and true apostles to the rest of the body of Christ.]* But how great is the privilege which waits those "overcoming" sons and daughters of God who shall make up the Bride company; and even now all creation waits in anticipation of the day of their UNVEILING (or manifestation—Rom. 8:19). Notice that Rebekah (a type of the Bride of Christ) was veiled until she was taken by Isaac into his mother's tent, but

after she became his wife she became unveiled (Gen. 24:65-67). So shall the day of the Bride's unveiling come after she has donned her "wedding garments" (glorified bodies like unto Christ's glorious body—Phil. 3:21), and has been received by her Bridegroom in celestial joy; for she will have a ministry to perform on earth during the time of great tribulation which is coming.

Notice Rev. 12:12-17 where Satan is pictured as sending out a "flood" of vilification and persecution against the "woman" (church), but "the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood." The "earth" here indicates the appearance (or manifestation) of the saints of the Bride Company in their glorified earth bodies (flesh and bone—see Luke 24:39), to open their mouths and speak words of help and deliverance that will nullify the fear-instilling propaganda, threats and persecution being "poured out" on Christians in that day. They will be able to appear to individual saints or to groups gathered together just as Jesus appeared to the disciples who had shut themselves in with the doors barred "for fear of the Jews " (see John 20:19,26). Jesus dispelled their fears and gave them new hope and courage.

Most Christians of the fundamentalist churches believe that all those who are born again will be in the so called "rapture" when Christ comes for His church. Scarcely a worse delusion could be entertained. Christ's Kingdom is to be a ruling kingdom (Rev. 5:10, 20:6). Even in the kingdoms (or nations) of men, think of the chaos that would result if immature, unproven babes and children were put in positions of responsibility to run the "affairs of state." Horrors! If man would not do such a foolish thing, what makes anyone think that God would? Even Jesus' parables of the "talents" and "pounds" show that those to be received into His heavenly kingdom are to be given posts of rulership: "Well done, good and faithful servant: *you have* been faithful over a few things, I will make *you ruler over many things*" (Matt, 25:21)... "Well, [] good servant: because *you have* been faithful in a very little, have [] authority over ten cities" (Luke 19:17). The majority of Christians in the world are yet babes and children, spiritual progress and growth considered. Many have begun to enter into the "adolescent" stage, which is good and needful, but this is a "problem time" in spiritual growth, even as it is in the natural. The chief difficulty seems to be spiritual pride (see I Cor. 8:1-2), which can manifest in many ways.

It is beyond the scope of this short introduction to elaborate, but we can see a type of spiritual pride and consequences in the story of Noah after the flood. Noah planted a vineyard (a type of the Kingdom); but when he drank the fruits thereof, it went to his head, exposing his nakedness and gendering a curse to some (see Gen. 9:20-25). How often is this true when Christians begin to grow and partake of the greater fruits and blessings of the Kingdom. They get "heady" on the "wine", and havoc is often the result. And how hard it is to teach and correct those who are exhilarated in the "fling" of adolescent pride. But thank God there are Christians who have begun to enter into a measure of maturity: who are becoming "pillars" in the temple (church) of

God through overcoming (Rev. 3:12). Only such "overcomers" are to sit with Christ on His throne and be given power over the nations (Rev. 2:26-27, 3:21, 12:5).

Those who are to rule and reign with Christ are to be kings and priests (Rev. 5:10), and joint-heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17). In the Old Testament times, kings and priests had to be anointed for their offices with the holy anointing oil which was poured upon their heads to sanctify (separate) them *to the Lord* (Ex. 29:7; Lev. 8:12; I Sam. 10:1; 16:13). This is a type of the Holy Spirit baptism which is pictured in the book of Acts as being "poured out upon", "coming *on*" or "falling *on*" those who received (Acts 1:8, 2:17-18, 8:15-17, 10:44-45, 11:15, 19:6). See also Psalm 133. The Lord made it clear however in the Old Testament types, that He requires a proving (through testing) resulting in obedience and faithfulness (I Sam. 2:27-35, 13:13-14, 15:22-23, Acts 13:21-22), or those "anointed" could "lose out" on their high calling. In Rev. 17:13, those who are with "the Lamb" are the "called, and chosen, and faithful". This is why Peter says we must "give diligence to make our calling and election sure" (II Pet. 1:10). Salvation is a free gift (Rom. 6:23), which is different than the prize of the high calling of God (Phil. 3:14); and for that "prize" one must "run" (see I Cor. 9:24-27, Heb. 12:1), in order to be successfully "crowned." We are called "to His kingdom and glory (I Thess. 2:12), and "to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ (II Thess. 2:14), that we might have our bodies changed into the likeness of "his glorious body," for it will be through such glorified saints ruling with Christ that He will be able "to subdue all things to himself" (Phil. 3:21). "Many are called, but few are chosen" (Matt. 22:14). Truly it is a "high," "holy" and "heavenly" calling (see Phil. 3:14, II Tim. 1:9, Heb. 3:1), to be in Christ's ruling Body and Kingdom.

Also, in Bible times, a son became a "joint heir" in the inheritance of his father only after he had been tutored, disciplined, and grown to sufficient maturity to be formally "placed as a son." This "placing as a son" is the correct translation of the Greek word huiotthesia which appears in Ephes. 1:5, Rom. 8:15,23 & Gal. 4:5, and is misleadingly translated, "adoption," in the King James version; for it has nothing to do with adoption as we use that term. It has to do with those who are already "born again" children in the family of God, but who reach that place of "overcoming" and spiritual maturity where they are ready for "placing as sons" as joint heirs with Christ. Paul says that we are "waiting for the adoption, [*that is to say*], the redemption of our body." (Rom. 8:23). Thus "full sonship" will come only when our bodies are glorified and made like *to* Christ's glorious body (Phil. 3:21). We will be joint heirs with Christ, IF so be that we suffer with him, that we may be glorified together (Rom. 8:17). . . If we suffer (for His sake) we shall also reign with him" (II Tim. 2:12). At the present time we have "the Spirit of adoption (within), whereby we cry Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15, Gal. 4:6). This "firstfruits of the Spirit" is the "seal" and "down payment" of our inheritance, "until the redemption of the purchased possession" (Ephes. 1:13-14, II Cor. 1:21-22, Rom. 8:23).

All truly born again children of God are predestined to the "adoption" or "placing as sons": to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ (Ephes. 1:5, Rom. 8:29). But not all will be ready at the same TIME. Let me give an illustration. Suppose a very rich man with vast business enterprises had a large family of children. These could vary in age from babes to teenagers. We will say that it is the father's purpose for all of his sons and daughters to be adequately cared for, disciplined, schooled and prepared for the day that they were sufficiently grown in maturity, understanding and responsibility to be given a share in the family inheritance and "placed" as mature sons and daughters in positions or "posts" of executive oversight in the family businesses. Obviously not all the children would be ready to be co-heirs in the family inheritance at the same time. Not only would the difference in their ages preclude that, but no doubt some would be much more diligent than others, wanting to please their father and prove that they were trustworthy, responsible, faithful, etc. Others, on the other hand, might be so selfish, careless, and foolish as to "fritter away" their opportunities. Thus they would require more time for the father to prove them, before they could share in the family inheritance and be "placed" in positions of responsibility.

In light of the foregoing Illustration, it may be easier for the reader to understand the reason why those to be received by Christ when He comes must be made READY (Matt. 24:44, 25:10, Rev. 19:7). And also Jesus' warning about those who will be rejected as being unqualified for the heavenly kingdom (Mt. 7:21-23, 22:11-14, 25:10-12, Lk. 12:45-47). Notice how Paul's words of admonition in Ephes. 5:14-18, parallel the parable of the wise and foolish virgins in Mt. 25:1-12. "Wherefore he says, awake *you who sleep* (the virgins were sleeping), and arise from the dead (spiritual deadness), and Christ shall give *you* light (oil for the virgin's lamps). See that *you* walk circumspectly (accurately, carefully), not as fools (as the foolish virgins), but as wise (as the wise virgins), redeeming the time (making the best use of it), because the days are evil (the pitfalls and temptations are many). Wherefore be [] not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is (see Mt. 7:21). And be not drunk with wine (the "wine" of Babylon—Rev. 17:2), wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit (the extra oil of the wise virgins). TIME is of the essence. It is Christ's purpose to "bring many sons to glory" (Heb. 2:10), "that he might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Rom. 8:29). And because of this, those who are not ready when the Lord comes for His Bride at the beginning of the tribulation, will have sufficient time (if they are diligent) during the tribulation period to "prove themselves" that the Lord might "know" them, and be received into His kingdom glory at the close of the tribulation.

In Gal. 4:7, Paul says that we are sons of God and thus heirs through Christ. But in 4:1-2, he points out that an heir, though potentially "lord of all" must await the "time appointed of the father" for his "adoption" or "placing as a son" in his full inheritance. So again we see it is a

matter of TIME. This was true dispensationally, for those under the law were kept "in bondage" or limitation to the elemental or rudimentary precepts of childhood, and under enforced servitude as a servant or slave (4:1,3). This was because the law was weak through the flesh (Rom. 8:3), and had no power to bring to perfection (or maturity). "For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did" (Heb. 7:19,11; 9:9; 10:1). But what was true dispensationally, is also true of each of us as individuals. Although we have been "redeemed" from the limitations and weaknesses of the law (Gal. 4:5), each of us begins our Christian experience as a "babe In Christ" (I Pet. 2:2), and we must grow up (Ephes. 4:14-15), if we are to receive the "adoption" to full sonship. We are sons, not servants (under the compulsory servitude of the law), but because we have been "bought with a price and belong to Christ (I Cor. 6:19-20, 7:22-23), we voluntarily submit to Him as His servants or love-slaves, that we might be "tutored" and "disciplined" by Him through the Spirit. Read Ex. 21:1-6, Deut. 15:12-17 for a type of this. Although freed by our Master, we say, "I love my master, I will not go out free," and we have our "ears bored through with an awl" (that we might hear His voice) and serve Him forever! See Rev. 22:3 & 21:7. SONS, yes; but also SERVANTS!

THE VOICE OF THE BRIDEGROOM

The title chosen for this article is significant. The Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Bridegroom, is now making ready a Bride to be received of Him when He comes (see Matt. 25:10, Rev. 19:7, Acts 15:14). But HOW is He making ready this Bride? To say that He is doing so by His Word and Spirit does not fully answer the question. Behold the pattern! Jesus came in the flesh some 1900 years ago, and at that time was to be presented to fleshly Israel as the Bridegroom. Israel was the Bride who was to be made ready for her Husband, Jehovah God. The "marriage covenant" had come into being many years previous at Mt. Sinai; but since God was Spirit and not flesh, it was impossible for Him to factually dwell with Israel in person, fully consummating the "marriage" relationship. For this purpose the invisible God had to incarnate Himself in a "garment" of flesh, so that He could be joined to a people of flesh.

We see this prophetically declared in Isa. 61:10, where the promised Messiah declares: "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He *has* clothed me with the GARMENTS of salvation (His physical body which would be given for our salvation), he *has* covered me with the ROBE of righteousness (the sinless righteousness of His inner or soul garment), AS A BRIDEGROOM decks himself with ornaments" (the literal Hebrew says "decks as a priest," for He was clothed with human flesh to fulfill the ministry of the High Priest). That the

Bride was also to be made ready at that time is indicated by the concluding words of verse 10: "and as a BRIDE adorns herself with her JEWELS" (noble character traits acceptable to her Bridegroom).

Natural Israel, however, was not willing to be made ready at the time of the Lord's coming in human flesh. She refused to receive her Bridegroom, choosing rather to continue her illicit affair with Rome, who was living with her at that time. Jesus symbolically alluded to this fact in His discussion with the woman of Samaria at Jacob's well (John 4:16-18). The woman represented God's covenant people at that time, Jacob-Israel. "Jesus said to her, go, call your husband, and come here. The woman answered and said, 'I have no husband.' Jesus said to her, you have well said, I have no husband: for you have had five husbands; and he whom you now have is not your husband." In the Greek language the word for husband and man is the same. Only the context can determine which wording should be used. Jesus was not saying she had been married to five different husbands, but rather that she had lived with five different men, and the man now living with her was not her man (husband). God had repeatedly accused Israel of being unfaithful to Him and having "affairs" with other nations and their idol-gods, and such involvement resulted in her captivity to those nations, with whom she had to live (see Ezek. 16:26, 28, 32; 23:5, 9, 14-17, 22-23, 30). Thus the five "men" which Jesus accused Israel of "having" were Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece, and "the man" who was living with her at the time of Jesus' ministry was Rome.

Israel's determination to "have" Rome, instead of her true Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, was expressed by the words of the chief priests before Pilate: 'We have no king but Caesar.' Of Jesus they said, "We will not have this man to reign over us." (see John 19:15, Luke 19:14}. Therefore was Jesus crucified. God's purpose, however, cannot be thwarted. The occasion of the death of the rejected Bridegroom was used to redeem all of sinful humanity, and to put into force a NEW marriage covenant (eliminating the one made at Sinai), and this with a NEW SPIRITUAL ISRAEL. Since the earthly Israel Bride was not ready to receive her Bridegroom, the marriage could not be consummated at Jesus' first coming; therefore AN EXTENDED PERIOD OF TIME was made necessary, that from the new spiritual Israel of the Gentiles, the Glorified Christ might "take out of them a people for His name" (Acts 15:14). And as a Bride takes her husband's name, so will a "new Israel Bride" out of the "children of promise" (Rom. 4:13-16, 9:6-8, Gal. 3:16-22, 29, 4:22-31) be made ready to receive the Lord Jesus at His coming AGAIN.

The consummation of the marriage will be made possible, not by the Bridegroom "lowering" Himself to the plane of human flesh through incarnation as He did previously, but by the process of "raising" the physical bodies of the Bride company to the plane of GLORIFIED LIFE, that the Bride might DWELL with her Husband in bodies like to His own glorious body (see Phil.

3:20-21). Jesus referred to this "raising up" (through translation and glorification) in John 6:39-40, 44; but His words can ALSO apply to the LATER "raising up" through resurrection of the dead bodies of the saints. (NOTE: since we are dealing only with that select group which will make up the Bride in this article, we will not go into the details of the resurrection of the "dead in Christ" and the translation of the living saints who will be "CALLED" to the marriage supper at the close of the tribulation (Rev. 19:9). They will also be "raised up" to the plane of glorified life as a part of the "Bridal retinue", both as "maidens in waiting" to the Bride, and as a part of the "government" of the Great King.)

[John the Baptist: The Role of the Friend of the Bridegroom]

With the foregoing factors in mind, let us now get to the key point of the pattern as it was portrayed in the life of John the Baptist. John was a special ministry raised up by God with a special message to fulfill the role of the "friend of the Bridegroom." In Bible times, when a man desired the hand of a certain maiden in marriage, he selected a close and trusted friend as a "go-between." When consent was secured from the maiden and her parents, this friend continued to act on the behalf of the Bridegroom throughout the period of formal arrangements, the vows of espousal and the marriage. When finally the Bridegroom had "taken" His Bride and escorted her to his home (or the home of his father) for the marriage festival and the marriage consummation, then was the joy of the friend of the Bridegroom fulfilled (John 3:29).

John the Baptist appeared on the scene shortly before Jesus began His ministry. John's ministry was to "turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; TO MAKE READY A PEOPLE PREPARED FOR THE LORD." (Luke 1:17). He was to "prepare the way" (Matt. 3:3) for the Lord to be fully united in marriage to His select Bride. Since natural Israel rejected her Bridegroom, the TRANSFERENCE took place as previously explained, and a new covenant was instituted (Matt. 21:43, 26:28). Now the close of another era is near, and before long the Bridegroom will come again to claim His spiritual Bride; this time to be received by her with joy. Should we not then see the pattern fulfilled in our day that special ministries with a special message be raised up by God to fulfill the role of the "friend of the Bridegroom?" John the Baptist was not of the ordinary priesthood of his day. Even so has the Lord raised up special messengers in our day who are not of the ordinary "priesthood" of the organized church world. They have been prepared, as was John, in a special "wilderness" of testing and proving. And they have a special commission to be as the "friend of the Bridegroom, which stands and HEARS him; rejoicing greatly because of the Bridegroom's VOICE." (John 3:29).

We read that "the WORD OF GOD came to John the son of Zacharias in the WILDERNESS." (Luke 3:2). He was "set apart" from traditional religion, so that he might receive a fresh revelation of the Lord's purpose. Even so in our day, it is taking a special ministry and message to prepare the Bride, for the Bride will be received of the Lord FIRST, when He comes at the midnight hour (Matt. 25:6, 10). The Bride is not the whole church, but a SELECT GROUP out of the church, pictured by the "manchild" (indicating SPIRIT preparedness) of Rev. 12:5, and the 144,000 firstfruits (the FIRST (unveiled to be ready) of Rev. 14:1. The Bride company will be THE FIRST OF THE SONS OF GOD TO BE TRANSLATED INTO GLORIFIED LIFE without the experience of death. Shortly after they receive their glorified bodies, they will be MANIFESTED or revealed, see Rom. 8:19) by APPEARING (as Jesus did after He was glorified—see Luke 24:13-43) to multiplied thousands of Christians on the earth.

[Martha & Mary: The Bride and Those Who Remain]

The truth of the above is beautifully portrayed in symbolic drama in the 11th chapter of John. Martha (who typifies the BRIDE of Christ) "as soon as she heard that Jesus was COMING, WENT and MET him" (John 11:20), while Mary REMAINED where she was. Mary represents the Christians who will be left behind when the Bride is taken. But notice the words in John 11:28. After Martha had met the Lord outside the city (symbolic of meeting the Lord "in the air"), she RETURNED, "and called Mary her sister secretly, saying, "The Master is come, and calls for you." Such will be the "messenger service" of the glorified sons of the Bride company to the church that remains on earth during the tribulation period. They will thus "feed the church in the wilderness" (Rev. 12:6). Since Martha went back and spoke to Mary SECRETLY, it shows that the ministry of the Bride company will be to Christians only—and not to the people of the world. However, because of their "manifestation," by which they shall nourish, uphold, protect and guide the remaining church in its ministry to the world, these glorified sons will certainly be the means by which multitudes shall be "delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God." (Rom. 8:21).

In light of the symbolism of Martha and Mary in John chapter 11, I would like to make a few remarks on Luke 10:38-42. We have always been told that this passage shows that Mary was the spiritual one and Martha was not. Nothing could be further from the truth. It was Martha who received Jesus (and His disciples) into HER HOUSE (Luke 10:38), symbolic of the church, which is the household of God (Ephes. 2:19). Martha was evidently the older of the two and head of the house, thus being SYMBOLIC of those Christians who are more MATURE in the faith.

The name "Martha" means SOBRIETY (that of a deep and serious nature). It is sometimes translated as "lady." The way that Martha addressed Jesus in Luke 10:40, shows that she KNEW Him well and evidently had been His follower for some time. Her implicit faith is seen in John 11:27.

When Jesus and His hungry disciples were received into Martha's house, it was her responsibility to prepare for their needs and to "serve" them. She would have been grossly negligent if she had done otherwise. She was doing what she was supposed to, in order to fulfill the symbolism of those who are mature enough in their Christian faith and experience to be "up serving" the Master. Martha was rebuked by Jesus, not because of her "serving," but because she was fretful about her need of help and because she was critical of Mary. Jesus made it clear that Mary had a need, and had chosen that which would not be taken from her (Luke 10:42). The name "Mary" means BITTERNESS or SORROW, and in the symbolic picture she represents the repentant soul whose need of salvation has led her (or him) to the "feet of Jesus" to receive that which will "not be taken away." This can only be a reference to the "born again" experience and the GIFT of eternal life (Rom. 6:23) which is not to be repented of (Rom. 11:29), or taken back by God. Thus the symbolic picture here fits that which is portrayed in John 11, showing Martha as the "elect lady."

The "bitterness" or "sorrow" of the name MARY also indicates that disappointment or grief of being left behind (as the "foolish virgins" of Matt. 25:8-12) when Martha, symbolic of the "wise virgins" or Bride is received of the Lord at the midnight hour (Matt. 25:6, 10). Mary represents "born again" Christians who have received the gift of eternal life, but who will be lacking in "oil" (the Holy Spirit) and not sufficiently prepared or proven to be in the Martha or Bride group. The Bride, being the first to be translated, MUST "make herself ready" AHEAD of time, before the "hour of trial" (the tribulation period) comes "on all the world, to try them that dwell on the earth" (Rev. 3:10). Therefore is a "John the Baptist" preparation ministry so essential at this time.

[Sonship or Brideship?]

I recently read an article which said, "'SONSHIP' not 'brideship' is the issue of the hour." It is just such misleading HALF-truths that cause confusion. The truth is, it is not a question of "sonship" OR "brideship," but of BOTH. Manifest sonship is the GOAL (in due time) that God has for ALL His growing sons and daughters now on the earth, whether they are chosen to fulfill the "role"

of the Bride in the coming Kingdom or some OTHER role. It is true that there will be manifested sons who are NOT in the Bride company, but ALL in the Bride company WILL BE MANIFESTED SONS (and daughters). This MUST be, unless we believe that the most exalted position in the coming Kingdom, that of the Lord's own heavenly Bride, is to be made up of a bunch of immature children. The most important person in the life of a great King is his bride or wife, but in order to rule a vast kingdom, he must have MANY to SERVE Him (and His Bride) in various capacities, as well as to fill many "posts" in His government. Even so there will be a VAST HOST (Rev. 7:9-17) of sons who will be ready to be manifested (revealed) by being translated and glorified at the close of the tribulation in order that they may "rule and reign" with Christ, but not functioning as a part of the Bride. (NOTE: it is not my purpose in this article to deal with the purpose and destiny which God has for those who enter manifest sonship in flesh and blood physical bodies on the earth plane. This is an entirely different subject, and has primarily to do with the millennial age coming; so is not of major concern to us. However, before the final curtain falls on this age, it seems certain that a "firstfruits" will manifest such physical immortality as a witness to the truth of the "finished work" of Jesus Christ, and as a beginning of the restoration of the "Edenic paradise" on earth as was experienced by Adam and Eve in the beginning.)

[Present Age Engagement vs. Coming Marriage]

We now need to take a closer look at the difference between the church as it has functioned on earth in a marriage covenant husband and wife relationship during THIS dispensation, and the coming HEAVENLY Bride of Christ for the NEW dispensation now AT HAND. In II Cor. 11:2-3, we see where all born-again, Spirit-sanctified, Christians are *ENGAGED* to Christ, but they must MAINTAIN their "virgin" estate; refusing "concourse" with the world and its defilements, remaining true (and faithful) to Christ alone, in order to be FACTUALLY PRESENTED to Christ (the Bridegroom) as His HEAVENLY Bride. In Bible days an espousal was virtually the same as our marriage today, with the exception that the Bridegroom usually did not "take" His Bride to live with him and consummate the marriage immediately. There was usually a period of time intervening. At the time of the espousal, the vows were exchanged, dowry and gifts given, and LEGALLY the couple were husband and wife. That an *engaged* couple were considered as husband and wife is seen in Deut. 22:23-24. It is also seen in the case of Joseph and Mary. Read Matt. 1:18-20, where Mary is said to be *engaged* to Joseph. Yet when Joseph discovered that Mary was "with child," as her HUSBAND he decided to "put her away" or DIVORCE her privately, not wanting to make a public example of her. Also the angel of the Lord said to Joseph, "fear not to TAKE to you Mary, your WIFE."

Now, we have been *engaged* or joined in covenant relationship to Christ, and spiritually we are "members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones" (Ephes. 5:30). As in the original Bible type, Eve was formed from a cell or seed taken from the body of Adam, so has the church come into being through being "born" of the incorruptible seed of Christ (1 Pet. 1:23); and as Eve was constituted the very flesh or "body" of Adam, so is the true spiritual church the "body" of Christ today. But Eve was joined to Adam as his wife, and thus the two become ONE; she being BOTH his body and his bride. Even so is the church NOW SPIRITUALLY joined to Christ in a husband and wife COVENANT relationship, for "he that is joined to the Lord is ONE SPIRIT" (I Cor. 6:17). Paul, speaking of the joining together of man and woman in the marriage relationship says, "This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church" (Ephes. 5:32).

However, we must distinguish between the church functioning today in a SPIRITUAL (BY the Holy Spirit) marriage covenant relationship to Christ, and the COMING FACTUAL and LITERAL joining together of Christ (the Bridegroom) and His HEAVENLY Bride: those who are a specially prepared and select group OUT of the present church organism functioning on earth, who are "virgins" indeed (both "wise" as in Matt. 25:4 and "undefiled" as in Rev. 14:4). The difference is simply a matter of DISPENSATIONAL truth. When Jesus died on the cross, the NEW marriage covenant relationship with spiritual Israel (the church) came into being. But the very act which sealed the covenant resulted in the Bridegroom being TAKEN from the church. When He was resurrected from the dead, His physical body was "raised" to the plane of glorified life, and it became impossible for the church during this dispensation to FACTUALLY DWELL with Him on that plane. Jesus foresaw this and spoke of it in these words: "Can the children of the bride-chamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is WITH them? But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be TAKEN from them, and then shall they fast." (Matt. 9:15). Robbed of His personal and immediate presence, the church has received His SPIRITUAL presence through the ministry of the Holy Spirit (John 14:15-18). And this spiritual marriage relationship has continued through the present dispensation.

Soon a definite change is to take place. And for the new dispensation, a new arrangement begins. The word "church" comes from the Greek ekklesia, which means "those who are called out." The true church has been "called out" of this world (and its evil) and separated to Christ. They are in the world but not of it (John 17:16). At present this is a spiritual separation. The word "sanctify" in the Greek means "to separate," and the true church has been sanctified or separated from the world to Christ by the blood (Heb. 13:12), by the Word (John 17:17; Ephes. 5:26), and by the Spirit (Rom. 15:16). These are "the three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water (the Word), and the blood" (I John 5:8). But when Christ returns, that portion of the true church which is ready is to be factually and literally "called out" of this world, to become the "heavenly Bride" of Christ. The remaining church on earth will continue to function by the spiritual ministry of the Holy Spirit throughout the tribulation period, and those who are

then truly sanctified (separated) *to* the Lord, making their "calling and election sure" (II Pet. 1:10), will also be literally "called out" of the world at the close of the tribulation, and along with the "dead in Christ" who will be raised at that time (I Thess. 4:16-17), will join the Lord and His Bride to function as His Household and Government in the new dispensation.

[The "Widowed" Church]

Because the Bridegroom was taken away, the church is symbolically portrayed in the scriptures as a "widow" during this dispensation. Jesus alluded to this when He said: "But I tell you a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias (Elijah), when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; but *to* none of them was Elias sent, save *to* Sarepta, the city of Sidon, *to* a woman that was a widow." (Luke 4:25-26). Elijah ministering to this gentile widow is a type of the Spirit of Christ ministering to the largely gentile church of this age. In the story (see I Kings 17:9-16) we also see a picture of the true church ministering to Christ (in the Spirit) as the widow sustained Elijah and put him first (17:9,13), and as a result her barrel of meal (the living Word of God) and the cruse of oil (the Holy Spirit presence) never failed (17:14). The three and one half years without rain (Lk. 4:25, James 5:17, I Kings 17:1, 18:1), equates to 1260 days, and when translated into prophetic time of a day for a year (Ezek. 4:6), it portrays the 1260 years from the time of the "rupture" of the church into east and west which took place over a number of years beginning in 692 A. D. "UNTIL the day that the Lord sends rain *on* the earth"—I Kings 17:14 (symbolizing the SECOND PENTECOST or "latter rain" which is coming).

In the New Testament, the same 1260 days are mentioned in Rev. 11:3, and from the long range historical perspective they portray the 1260 years that the "two witnesses" (elect remnant, down through this church age following the east-west division) have continued to "prophesy," "clothed in sackcloth," (grief and mourning during times of apostasy and persecution). We are now at the end of this historical time period, and because of the nearness to the "latter rain" outpouring, we are hearing "a sound of abundance of rain" (I Kings 18:41) during the present preparatory move of the Spirit. We are also in the time when Elijah (the Spirit of Christ in His people) is praying for the promised outpouring (I Kings 18:42-46, James 5:18; Zech. 10:1), and faith is arising as we see a " small cloud " of "elect witnesses" (Heb. 12:1) arising out of the sea (peoples) and yielding themselves to the purpose of God in this hour (I Kings 18:44), so we know that "a great rain" is near at hand (18:45).

In the meantime, the church, as a "widow," is willing to bear her "reproach" (Isa. 54:4), remaining faithful to her Husband, being sustained by His grace (I Kings 17:14), and waiting for Him to come and take her to dwell with Him. Like the widow of Luke 21:1-4, she gives to her Lord all that she has (and is) and like the widow of Luke 18:1-8, she continues steadfast in prayer and seeking of her Lord, knowing that He will "avenge" her completely of her adversary (the devil) when He comes for His elect. In contrast, we see the false church in Revelation, chapters 17 & 18. She has not remained faithful, but has committed fornication with the "kings of the earth" (leaning *on* the "arm of flesh"—Jer. 17:5). She has glorified herself, for she *says* in her heart, "I sit a queen, and am no widow" (Rev. 18:7). She may be a "queen" now, decking herself ostentatiously, (Rev. 17:4) in order to appeal to "the flesh," but she will not be the Lord's "queen" when He comes to take those who are the "called, and chosen, and faithful" (Rev. 17:14).

[The Imperative of Cleansed Soul "Garments" in the Present Age]

In light of the historical evidence of such "unfaithfulness," in the organized church systems of Christendom, we can see the importance of Paul's words in II Cor. 11:1-3: "I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy; for I have *engaged* you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity (single-hearted and pure devotion) that is in Christ." Eve is a type of the soul with its desire-nature (emotions, feelings, response, imagination), while Adam is a type of the spirit (reason, righteous judgment, will, determination), and the garden of Eden is a type of the physical body (which Adam was to "dress and keep"—Gen. 2:15). Thus we see our three-fold being symbolically portrayed in the Adam-Eve-Garden story in Gen. chaps. 1-3 (see I Thess. 5:23). It is through our "Eve" (soul-desires) that we who have been WED (in Spirit) to Christ, can be "beguiled" and turned from our single and pure devotion to Christ, entering into "'intimate associations" with the world and its defilements, and thus disqualifying ourselves from being presented to Christ as a "chaste virgin" (His Bride). This is in harmony with Rev. 14:4, where the 144,000 firstfruits are spoken of as being "not defiled with women." In other words, they have not been led astray by "Eve" (soul-desires) into compromising situations with the world (including the apostate religious world). Since they are not defiled with women, it is evident that the 144,000 are pictured as masculine (even as the manchild of Rev. 12:5). This is purely symbolic (for this group will be made up of both men and women) and shows that these "overcomers" are living and walking in the Spirit, rather than submitting to "the flesh" (soul-desires). See Gal. 5:16-26. Paul, in Rom. 8:4, says that those who walk after the Spirit, are having "the righteousness of the law" fulfilled in them. The word "fulfill" here means "to fill up" or "make full." In other words, the "linen

garment" of righteousness, which the Bride is seen clothed with in Rev. 19:8, is gradually woven into the very fabric of their inner being, until it is "full" (complete).

In Rev. 3:4, the "overcomers" are pictured as the ones who "have not defiled their garments." These are the inner or soul garments, which have been "washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb" (Rev. 7:14). Our past sins (the surface dirt and stains) are "washed away" by the blood when we receive forgiveness of sins (Rev. 1:5; Acts 22:16; I Cor. 6:11). But it is only the Spirit, working in us because of the blood, that can "bleach out" the "ground in" filth of the sin nature in our souls, making them white (pure). The intensity of the "whiteness" (or brightness) of our inner garments depends *on* the degree to which we have allowed the Spirit to remove that which is of the self and sin life within. When Jesus was transfigured on the mountain (a type of the heavenly Kingdom), His raiment became "White as light" (Mt. 17:2), or "shining (glistening), exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them" (Mark 9:3). This "white raiment" of Jesus is a type of His Bride (and Body) which shall adorn Him (being ONE with Him). It is the "pure (white) in heart" who shall see God and dwell with Him (Mt. 5:8). It is the Spirit-glory (brightness) which sanctifies us (Ex. 29:43, Rom. 15:16), separating us from all inner defilement, and also imparting and weaving in the righteousness of Christ. This is the "holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14). BOTH the negative (removing) and the positive (imparting) aspects of the Spirit's work are needed.

Now we can see the importance of not defiling (getting dirty again) our inner garments (Rev. 3:4, 14:4), that we might be among those of whom Jesus said, "they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy" (Rev. 3:4). This is why Paul admonishes us to "walk worthy of the vocation (calling) wherewith *you* are called" (Ephes. 4:1), and to "walk as children of the light" (Ephes. 5:8). In the Old Testament, Enoch (meaning "dedicated") is a type of the Bride, for "Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him" (Gen. 5:24). "By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death. . . for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God" (Heb. 11:5). So the Bride, (those who "follow the Lamb"—Rev. 14:4, walking with Him and pleasing Him), shall be translated first, at the beginning of the tribulation. These are to be followed by those who will be translated at the close of the tribulation, who come "out of great tribulation," "a great multitude which no man could number" standing "before the throne, and before the Lamb" (not "with Him", as those in Rev. 14:1). They are "clothed with white robes," having "made them white" during the tribulation period (see Rev. 7:9,14). They are symbolized by Elijah, the second man in the Old Testament who was translated without seeing death (II Kings 2:11).

[Distinguishing Sin and Uncleanness]

Because it is important that we not defile our inner garments, I will add a few more comments which I hope will be helpful. In Zech. 13:1 we read: "in that day there shall be a fountain opened to the House of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness." The "fountain" was opened at Calvary when Jesus gave Himself as a vicarious sacrifice, and out of His side came forth blood and water (John 19:34). The blood was to atone for sin, and the water symbolized the Word which is to purge out uncleanness (John 15:3; Ephes. 5:26). It is important to realize that all sin is uncleanness, but not all uncleanness is sin. In other words we can experience uncleanness in our mental-emotional being without actually committing any sin. However, such "uncleanness" hinders our fellowship with the Lord, and can keep us from fully entering into the covenant blessings, joys, and powers that the Lord has prepared for us.

This is vividly portrayed in the law of the Old Testament. All sin or moral uncleanness had to be removed by the admission of guilt (confession) and the bringing of a sin or trespass offering to the priest to "atone for" the offense (Lev. 5:5-6, Num. 5:6-8). This we can readily understand, for under the New Covenant when we sin we must repent, confess and receive forgiveness and cleansing through the blood of Christ (see I John 1:6-10). But under the law there was also ceremonial uncleanness which rendered individuals "defiled," and when in this state of impurity, the Hebrews were forbidden to enter the sanctuary, partake of the sacred offerings and gifts, etc. Only the clean were fit to approach the Holy God and all that appertained to Him (Lev. 7:19-21, 22:3, Num. 9:6-7, 18:11). Some of the bodily conditions, such as the diseases of leprosy and issues of blood, were types of sin, for as we said before, all sin is uncleanness. But there were other conditions, such as the eating of unclean meats, touching the carcass of an unclean animal, or touching a dead human body, which were not acts of sin, but still rendered a person unclean. For these conditions, cleansing came through water (washing, bathing, or sprinkling). Read especially Lev. chaps. 11 & 15, and Deut. chap. 19. This is a type of the cleansing of the church "with the washing of water by the word" (Ephes. 5:26).

Again, the two main ways of contacting uncleanness was by eating (unclean meats) and touching (dead bodies or carcasses). "Eating" is a type of fellowship and intimate association, showing that God's people are to have "no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness" (Ephes. 5:11). "Touching" that which was dead is a type of contact with the world and those who are "dead in trespasses and sins" (Ephes. 2:1). God's command is to "come out from among them, and be [] separate, says the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father to you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty. Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness (defilement) of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God (II Cor. 6:17-

7:1). But read also II Cor. 6:14-16. The typical significance of Jesus' washing of the disciples feet as recorded in John 13:4-10 is important here. In our "daily walk" as Christians we contact the uncleanness of the world, and what we see and hear can "rub off" on us, so to speak, and bring a certain amount of defilement into our thinking and feeling. Therefore we need to spend time alone with the Lord in meditation, prayer and reading of the Word, so that the Lord can "wash our feet" and cleanse us from the filth of the world. Through mutual fellowship and ministry in the Word, we can also wash one another's feet (John 13:14). However, it is only as we heed, apply, and obey the Word, receiving into our inner being its teaching, reproof, correction and instruction in righteousness (II Tim. 3:16), that it is truly effective for our daily cleansing.

[Chaste, Unblameable, Faultless and Perfect]

We have seen by Paul's statement in II Cor. 11:2 that the Bride is to be presented to Christ as a "chaste virgin." In Col. 1:22, we read that those so presented are to be "unblameable and unreprovable in his sight." and in Col. 1:28-29, Paul declares that His labors, preaching, warning and teaching are to the intent that he might "present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." The word "unblameable" in Col. 1:22 is from the Greek word amomos, and is the same word which is translated in Rev. 14:5 as "without fault" in the description of the 144,000. The same word is translated "faultless" in Jude 24. In Heb. 9:14 this Greek word is translated "without spot" in describing the vicarious ministry of Jesus Christ as He presented Himself to God on our behalf. The word indicates that which is without blemish, blame or spot. It is only through the grace of Christ that any can be presented to Him "without fault." Only those whose hearts are right toward the Lord (being yielded and completely submissive), daily walking in fellowship with Him and in the light (truth-purity), and daily submitting to His purgung and cleansing from ALL unrighteousness and uncleanness, can be "holy and without blame before him in love (Ephes. 1:4), and "blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ (I Cor. 1:8). Wherefore, beloved seeing that *you* look for such things, be diligent that *you* may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless (II Pet. 3:14). Those "called out" of this world are to be presented to Him "a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish (without blame or fault)." Ephes. 5:27.

Not only presented as "a chaste virgin", and "without fault," but also "perfect" as Paul states in Col. 1:28. The Greek word translated "perfect" is teleios, and means that which is finished or completed with reference to a certain goal or objective, as when a builder or workman completes a building or project of some kind. The word is used by Paul in Phil. 1:6 where he says: "Being confident of this very thing, that he *who has begun* a good work in you will

perform (finish, perfect) it until the day of Jesus Christ." This word can also be translated "mature," as the goal of "growing up in all things in Christ," to a "perfect" (mature) man, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Ephes. 4:15,13). But read all of Ephes. 4:11-16. This is too vast a subject to be covered here, but "perfection" is the goal which the Lord has for all His children (Matt. 5:48). And there is a prescribed measure of perfection or maturity which must be incorporated into the inner being of all who are to be "called out" of this world through the "door" of glorification and presented to Christ. This is why we must continue to grow (I Pet. 2:2, II Pet. 3:18) and "go on to perfection" (Heb. 6:1), being ready to receive the "adoption" to full sonship as explained in the introduction.

[The Friend of the Bridegroom Ministry Today]

In light of all that God is revealing concerning the "making ready" of the Bride, we can see the importance of a "John the Baptist" ministry to act as the "friend of the Bridegroom" and to hear HIS VOICE in this day of preparation, and help bring about a RESTORATION of that which has been lost. When ancient Israel turned away from God, and was under His hand of judgment, His word came through the prophet Jeremiah as follows: "For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will cause to cease out of this place in your eyes, and in your days, the voice of mirth, and the voice of gladness, the VOICE of the BRIDEGROOM, and the VOICE of the BRIDE" (see Jer. 7:34; 16:9; 25:10). Since the land became desolate and the people carried captive into Babylon, we can see how that it was literally fulfilled that the voice of the Bridegroom and the voice of the Bride CEASED out of the cities of Judah and Jerusalem. However, to us there is a spiritual application. Because of the SPIRITUAL DESOLATION that has come to the church, the voice of the Bridegroom and the voice of the Bride has not been heard in the land as God intended. But NOW is the time for RESTORATION. The Bridegroom (Christ) is beginning to SPEAK as never before since the days of the early church apostles, for He is raising up specially prepared ministries who have heard His voice and are making known His purposes for this time; and in turn a Bride is being prepared who will yet speak with a Word of greater power and authority.

The Lord speaks through Jeremiah of this restoration in chap. 33:7-11. Although this passage had an application to natural Israel (and still does), we must see its application to spiritual Israel or the Church. "And I will cause the captivity of Judah and the captivity of Israel to return, and will build them, as at the first. And I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against me. . . And it shall be to me a name of joy, a praise and an honour before all the nations of the earth, which shall hear all the good that I do to them: there shall be heard in this

place. . . the voice of joy, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the voice of them that shall say, Praise the lord of hosts: for the Lord is good; for his mercy endures for ever: and of them that shall bring the sacrifice of praise into the house of the Lord. For I cause to return the captivity, as at the first, says the Lord." The Lord purposes to bring the church completely out of the "Babylonish captivity" of man's systems and ways to a FULL RESTORATION, as at the beginning. And even power and glory beyond that! And in this restoration, the "voice of the bridegroom" (Christ), and the "voice of the bride" (prepared and anointed saints) will come forth as never before.

In Joel 2:15-16 we read these words, "Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly: Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children, and those that suck the breasts; let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet." Here, we have the work of preparation being done by those who are "lifting up their voices like a trumpet" in Zion (the church).

Isa. 58:1. There is a coming together of those who are hearing what the Spirit is saying in this end time, both of the spiritually mature ones (elders) and also children and babes (in Christ). We are being sanctified (separated) to a fast (of cleansing from the defilements of the world and the religious systems of "Babylon" (Rev. 18:4). Now, because of this preparatory work of the Lord, we can expect Joel 2:16 to be fulfilled by the Bridegroom coming forth in a greater moving of His Spirit ("out of His chamber"), and by the Bride company beginning to come forth in a greater ministry ("out of her closet"). In Mal. 4:2 we see where the Lord is called "the Sun of righteousness" who shall "arise with healing in his wings." Now compare this with Psalm 19:4-6 where we read, "In them (the heavens) *has* he set a tabernacle for the sun, which is as A BRIDEGROOM coming out of his chamber, and rejoices as a strong man to run a race." Yes, our Bridegroom (Jesus) is coming forth as a "strong man" in greater spiritual power among those being prepared. His "friends" (special messengers) are now hearing and trumpeting His Word. The Bride company is being "sealed" (Rev. 7:3) for a greater ministry in further preparation and anticipation of the day of manifestation which is coming. Although I have pointed out the spiritual application of Joel 2:16 and Psalm 19:5, this is preliminary to the time when the Bridegroom will literally come "out of His chamber" (heaven) and return for His Bride, who will then come "out of her closet" of being "hid with Christ in God" on this earth (Col. 3:3) and be translated out of the earthly into the heavenly to appear with Christ in glory (Col. 3:4).

This brings us back to the "friend of the Bridegroom." As the "marriage of the Lamb" approaches, we can see the importance of this type of end-time ministry to fulfill the pattern given in John 3:22-30. The setting which occasioned John the Baptist's remarks on this subject is seen in verse 26. Reports were brought to John that Jesus and His disciples were baptizing and

"all men came to him" (Jesus). In other words, "Jesus is getting a greater following than you!" What an occasion for "ministerial jealousy" to arise in the heart of John! But John knew his place, and had been well prepared by the Spirit of God. John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven." (3:27). John knew that his ministry was to prepare the Bride for the Bridegroom, and for a trusted "friend of the Bridegroom" to seek to usurp the place of the Bridegroom and draw the affections and loyalty of the people to himself was unthinkable. Would to God that all ministries of today were as wise and as well prepared as John! If we want the adulation and affection of people directed toward us—if we want a following so that we can boast about how far-reaching our ministry is, and what great things we are doing—then we are in no position to fulfill that sensitive and delicate ministry of the "friend of the Bridegroom" in this day. John said, "He that *has* the bride is the Bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease." (John 3:29-30).

"He must increase, but I must decrease." How much are these simple, straight-forward, self-effacing words of John akin to that which is spoken of the 144,000 in Rev. 14:5: "And in their mouth was found no guile." In this they are following the Lamb's example (Rev. 14:4) for the apostle Peter says, "For even hereto were *you* called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that *you* should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth." (I Pet. 2:21-22). Likewise did Jesus speak of Nathaniel when He said, "Behold an Israelite Indeed, in whom is no guile!" "Nathaniel" means "gift of God." It is only by the gift of God's grace through Jesus Christ that we can be "Israelites indeed" (in Spirit and Truth), as we read in Rom. 2:28-29; 9:6-8, and be "without guile" in that day when the Bride company shall be "redeemed from (away from) the earth" (Rev. 14:3) into the glories of celestial realms of Christ. The word "Israel" means "ruling with God," and thus the name can only refer, in its true meaning and application, to those spiritual overcomers who will be co-heirs and co-rulers with Christ as "kings and priests" over the earth (Rev. 5:10). Oh how we should long to be Israelites indeed, circumcised completely within (Rom. 2:29), totally pure in heart (Mt. 5:8), without reservation as to our dedication as a "living sacrifice" to God (Rom. 12:1), without compromise in our fidelity to Christ our Bridegroom (Rev. 14:4, 17:14), and so absolutely sincere and honest before God and man that there cannot possibly be any guile in our mouths. This is the path to Sonship and Brideship!

[Manifest Sonship Still Future]

Yes, the issue of the hour is sonship! For regardless of the particular "role" (or "post" of responsibility) we are chosen to fulfill in the coming Kingdom of our Lord, the Lord's purpose is that we all come (in due time) to manifest sonship. But the issue is just as clearly that of Brideship! For the first of the sons of God to be unveiled (manifested) in celestial glory, will be that group or select "chaste virgin" company which will be received of the Bridegroom at the midnight hour, entering with Him into the marriage, forever to be His heavenly Bride (Mt. 25:10), and to sit with Him on His throne of glory (Rev. 3:21). The ministry of the "friend of the Bridegroom" (special messengers who help prepare the Bride) is not over yet; in fact, such ministry has not yet come into its fulness. Through the extended grace and mercy of God we have yet a time of preparation that we might be ready for the coming day of manifestation. We are in the "dawning" of the era of the manifested sons of God, but that day has not yet arrived when some shall be changed and put on immortality "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last (the 7th—Rev. 10:7) trump" (I Cor. 15:52). There are presumptuous souls in the land who claim they have already arrived: they are already manifested sons of God; and they have already come into the realm of the "perfect" as mentioned in I Cor. 13:10; and they are now beyond the realm of the "gifts" and "ministries" given to the church (I Cor. 12:7-10, Ephes. 4:11). But such is not true! There are yet many changes that must take place within each of us in this day of preparation, even from spiritual "glory to glory" (II Cor. 3: 18), and we need the gift-ministries and gifts of the Spirit to help bring us "to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ (Ephes. 4:11-15).

The word "changed" in II Cor. 3:18 is a translation of the Greek word metamorphoomai, from which we get the English "metamorphosis" (a word which indicates transformation, such as is seen in the changes in a caterpillar until it emerges as a beautiful butterfly). The same Greek word is translated "transfigured" in Mt. 17:2 to describe the change that took place in the body of Jesus on the mountain. The same Greek word is translated "transformed" in Rom. 12:2. Thus we can see that we are now to be transformed within "from glory to glory" until that day when we are ready to "emerge" from the "cocoon" of our terrestrial body into the transfigured glory and beauty of our celestial body (see I Cor. 15:20, Phil. 3:21).

[Discipleship and the Present Process of Regeneration]

Let's take a final look at Rev. 14:4 where the 144,000 are described as those who "follow the Lamb *wherever he goes.*" In Mt. 16:24 we read: "Then said Jesus *to his disciples*, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." Jesus was not in this instance giving the formula for salvation (which is a free gift—Rom. 6:23), but rather the

requirements for those who aspire to follow Him to the summit of full sonship (co-heirship and co-rulership) in His celestial Kingdom. Notice, He spoke these words to His disciples. A "disciple" is one who has taken *on* himself the "yoke" (will) of Christ, and is being taught (disciplined, tutored) by Him (Mt. 11:29). The path of discipleship is *to* perfection (that which is complete, full, mature) as we read in Luke 6:40: "The disciple is not above his master (teacher), but every one (disciple) shall be perfected as his master (marginal reading)." See also Mt. 19:21.

Looking again at Mt. 16:24, the three requirements given by Jesus for discipleship are self-denial, taking up our cross (obedience and self sacrifice), and following Him (in His example of complete submission to the Father's will in every aspect of life). To love any person or any thing more than we love the Lord disqualifies us from being His disciples (Mt. 10:37, Lk. 14:26). We must be willing to forsake ALL (that would hinder us in any way from "going on" with Him), Lk. 14:33. We must "hate" our own self-life, being willing to "lose" our soulish (self) life, that we might "find" the spiritual (Christ) life (Mt. 10:39, 16:25). We must "count the cost" of building a "tower" that leads to the heavenly kingdom (Lk. 14:28-30), which is the "prize of the high (or heavenly—Heb. 3:1) calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:14). We must be willing to settle for conditions of total surrender (peace) lest we find ourselves "fighting" (resisting) God's calling and purpose for us (Lk. 14:31-32).

In Mt. 19:27, Peter asks Jesus this question "Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed you, what shall we have therefore?" In quoting Jesus' answer in verse 28, I am going to change the punctuation provided by the translators (which I believe is incorrect) by removing the comma after the word "me" and placing it after the word "regeneration," to make it read like this: "*truly I say to you, that you who have followed me in the regeneration,* when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, *you also shall sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*" NOW (this age) is the time of regeneration (or re-creation) in the inner man. As we FOLLOW Him, we are being increasingly regenerated. This IS a MUST if we are to share His throne and rule with Him. Now notice verse 29: "And every one that *has* forsaken houses, or brethren or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold." Here we have the "hundredfold" ("full corn in the ear"—Mk. 4:20,28) who shall be "harvested" OUT of the lower (earthly) realm and translated into the upper (heavenly) realm to rule with Christ. The thirty and sixty fold (blade and ear) shall remain on the earth. So take heed! If you want to be WITH Christ in His ruling Kingdom, FOLLOW HIM IN THE REGENERATION!!!

[Ed. Note – for further study of the preparatory prophetic ministry to come ahead of the Lord's return, please consult brother's Earl booklet Elijah Comes First.]

